

2011

Trials & tributaries: myth and disaster in southern Louisiana

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TRIALS & TRIBUTARIES:
MYTH AND DISASTER IN SOUTHERN LOUISIANA

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts

in

The School of Art

by
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August 2011

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my fabulous faculty committee: Denyce Celentano for her energy and massive mental library of cultural and artistic references; Ed Smith for his pith and encouragement for me to make my own decisions; Kelli Kelley for inspiring me and helping me to find my way; Justin Walsh, his encyclopedic Greek database brain, and no-nonsense paper-editing. I would not have made it without my committee chair, Kimberly Arp, who built most everything in the printmaking department with his hands, and who has patiently nurtured countless generations of art students through their Master-of-Fine-Arts-angst.

Thanks to printmaking professors Leslie Koptcho of Louisiana State University and Teresa Cole of Tulane University, for their inspiration and encouragement. And, finally, thanks must go to my husband and ballast, Blake Sanders, for cooking and doing all the laundry for 3 years while I have been whittling away at my sanity.

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ABSTRACT

Trials and Tributaries examines recent disasters occurring in southern Louisiana, interpreted through the Greek myths The Twelve Labors of Herakles. Mankind's false sense of control over Louisiana's resources leaves us vulnerable to nature's powerful acts of reclamation: hurricanes, floods and the ground sinking beneath our feet. While researching the details and origins of The Twelve Labors, I found a plethora of similarities with local culture, politics and natural disasters. The characters in these narrative prints include hybrid monsters drawn from Greek mythology, which I have then further augmented with various forms of local south Louisiana fauna and contemporary political figures. I explore events ranging from Hurricane Katrina of 2005; the BP oil spill in the Gulf, Summer 2010; and the raging university budget cuts going on during my thesis year, 2010-11. The exhibition consisted of nine woodcut prints on repurposed bed sheet fabrics, appliqué stitched together to form colorful, layered surfaces. Accompanying the prints were a collection of crocheted floor pieces called "foot prints," which incorporated scrap fabric from the printing process as well as clothing donations. The pluming shapes of the "foot prints" mirror Doppler images of monstrous weather conditions, encroaching on painfully smaller coastal cities and ecosystems. This powerful image of pluming dangerous substances or weather systems is the embodiment of the force behind *Trials and Tributaries*.

TRIALS & TRIBUTARIES: MYTH AND DISASTER IN SOUTHERN LOUISIANA

INTRODUCTION

“Trials and Tributaries” is a collection of woodcuts and crocheted floor pieces exploring the relationships between a series of political, geographical, and meteorological disasters in southern Louisiana. Through the lens of the Greek myths known as The Twelve Labors of Herakles, I examine recent disasters occurring during my residence in Louisiana such as Hurricane Katrina in 2005, the British Petroleum oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010 and the devastating budget cuts presently being forced upon Louisiana State University and other public education institutions in the state. By re-imagining Louisiana disasters about a hero’s growth alongside interrelated political, environmental and meteorological events, I hope to highlight an ecosystem personified through human-animal hybrids.

The monstrous animal characters in my prints are imprisoned in their human likenesses. They represent the oppressed and oppressors alike, locked in a single ecological system where man feeds ravenously on his environment, weakening it unto greater and greater devastations. Mankind’s false sense of control over Louisiana’s resources leaves us vulnerable to nature’s powerful acts of reclamation: hurricanes, floods and the ground sinking beneath our feet.

In my work I address several forms of hybridity through the use of monster characters. Inspired by The Twelve Labors of Herakles, I access the image of powerful yet flawed Herakles, on his chosen journey from mortal to immortal. I hybridize the form of Herakles with that of the Louisiana state animal, the black bear. The prints also include other hybrid monsters drawn from Greek mythology,

which I have then further augmented with various forms of local South Louisiana fauna and contemporary political figures.

The Louisiana landscape that acts as a stage for my beasts is at once dangerous and rich with resources. The mythological narratives depicted speak to the ties between acts of natural upheaval and humanity's exploitation of this Gulf region, made exceptional by its geologic youth, liquid Mississippi highway, petroleum reserves and abundant wildlife.¹

THE TWELVE LABORS OF HERAKLES

While reading Robert Graves' analysis of the Labors, I became intrigued by the relationships I discovered between the narratives and politics of classical Greek society and, on the other hand, those of my local Louisiana environment and its related struggles.² I am drawn to the poetic violence of artistic depictions of Greek characters from the Classical period, including Diosphos P.'s *Vase No. 461* depicting Herakles and the Hydra with Athena; Iolas, the crab; and a fire used to dry out the oversaturated ground (Fig. 1).

Also influential are later works inspired by Classic imagery such as Peter Paul Rubens' painting "Hercules Fighting the Nemean Lion" (Fig. 2) and his drawing on the same theme, "Hercules Strangling the Nemean Lion," ca. 1620 (Fig 3). From my first viewing of these works, I was enveloped by the rich drama inherent in the

¹ "Southeastern Louisiana occupies not the ancient hardened lithosphere of the rest of North America, but rather a dynamic, fluid deltaic plain aged only seven millennia. New Orleans proper has existed for roughly six percent of the entire lifespan of its underlying geology — 292 years out of around 5,000 — a remarkably high ratio that few other cities, resting on earth usually millions of years old, can claim. New Orleans' terrain ranks as the youngest of any major American city, while southeastern Louisiana forms, as Mark Twain put it, 'the youthfulest batch of country that lies around there anywhere.' Richard Campanella, "New Fuel for an Old Narrative: Notes on the BP Oil Disaster," *The Design Observer Group: Places*, September 7, 2010, (accessed January 5, 2011).

² Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths: Complete Edition* (London: Penguin Books, 1992). 446-520.

precariousness of the battle. The potential for triumph of either man or beast is palpable in the thick figures' treacherous embrace. This particular image of battle between man and animal, and other images that I discovered in my continued research, were the origin of my exploration of the conflict between man and landscape in South Louisiana through this lens of The Twelve Labors.

Through researching each of The Twelve Labors and related Greek artworks, I became inspired to create my own vision of The Labors, set in contemporary South Louisiana. I cannot read about The Flesh Eating Mares of Diomedes, the three-headed dog guarding the underworld or a great eight-headed swamp creature, assisted by an over-sized blue crab, without needing to jump to put pencil to paper and document the terrible and fantastic images that spring into my mind.



Figure 1

Diosphos P. Vase No. 461. Provenance: Greece, Euboea, Eretria. Collection: Musee du Louvre: CA598



Figure 2

Sir Peter Paul Rubens, *Hercules Fighting the Nemean Lion*, oil on canvas.
Collection/Giraudon / The Bridgeman Art Library International. Date Unknown.



Figure 3

Sir Peter Paul Rubens, *Hercules Strangling the Nemean Lion*, red, yellow and black chalk, brush and red ink, and gouache on paper, Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute Collection. Ca. 1620

While impressive in their imagined beauty and narrative power, The Labors are also deeply rooted in actual political and social history. Like many Greek myths, The Labors were developed over many generations as formalized narrative versions of kingship and marriage rites with references thrown in to address the signs of the zodiac.³ Robert Graves' discussion of the myths is helpful in its analysis of the relationship between actual historical events and fantastical metaphor in The Labors. He notes in the introduction that every element of Greek court-ritual is

³ Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths: Complete Edition* (London: Penguin Books, 1992). 471.

mirrored in “addition to the accepted myth of events in Heaven.”⁴ In other words, the Greek myths retell and symbolically elaborate upon actual politics and culture of Classical times. In my use of the structure of The Twelve Labors, I draw similar associations between metaphorical narration with human-animal hybrid characters and references to contemporary Louisiana politics and culture.

HERAKLES & THE LOUISIANA BLACK BEAR

Herakles is a complex lead for these tales. He embodies great strength as well as the potential for danger and failure. Herakles represents ultimate power and endurance, but it must be noted that all of The Twelve Labors are penance for the murder of his own family. The goddess Hera, wife of Herakles’ father, forced the madness upon Herakles that induced the killing of his family. Herakles is still markedly flawed by this evil act, which contrasts with his many heroic deeds.

Herakles is messianic in nature. Through self-sacrificial tasks set upon him by the gods, he rids various lands of their troubling monsters, metaphors of illness, flood and other oppressions. The Twelve Labors are penance not only for the madness Hera placed upon him but also appear to flush out a variety of other evils of his time such as relieving a village of dung-fed flies by cleaning the Stables of Augeias and healing illness by driving out the Stymphalian Birds. Like Louisiana itself, Herakles appears to succeed by reaching small goals but ultimately ends up in approximately the same place as he began. Herakles is best understood as a type or Platonic Form, which many generations of leaders have inhabited. I adapted

⁴ Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths: Complete Edition* (London: Penguin Books, 1992). 23.

Herakles to my own purposes by importing him to a realm of contemporary politicians, landscapes and creatures of the Southern Louisiana region.

I hybridized the narrative form of Herakles with the Louisiana official state animal: the black bear, combining his exploits and adventures with various recent disasters including Hurricane Katrina (here re-dubbed “Hurricane Hera,” for the goddess who inspired Herakles’ name as well as the madness for which his Labors were retribution) and the British Petroleum oil spill in the Gulf. Other characters in this narrative body of work are an amalgamation of the local fauna that have been deeply impacted by recent disasters, human encroachment, contemporary corporate and political figures and fantastical beasts from The Twelve Labors.

THE PELICAN

In addition to the Louisiana Black Bear, the pelican is an obvious symbol for the state of Louisiana, due in part to its presence in the state seals “since at least 1804”⁵ The bird is an important part of the coastal ecosystem, despite the fact that it has disappeared several times from the Louisiana landscape as a result of hurricane damage combined with a slew of other causes including high levels of pollutants such as chlorinated hydrocarbons.⁶ The sludge-covered specimens have been a ubiquitous symbol of ecological tragedy following the British Petroleum oil spill. The pelican depicted in the state flag pricks her breast to feed her young from her own blood. As English Literature and Language Professor Eva C. Hangen has noted,

⁵ Benjamin F. Shearer and Barbara S. Shearer, *State Names, Seals, Flags, and Symbols: A Historical Guide, Revised and Expanded* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1994).

⁶ Harry Hansen, ed., *Louisiana: A Guide to the State*, ed. Harry Hansen (New York, New York: Hastings House, 1971). xxvii.

due to this “early belief that the pelican pierced her breast” to feed her young, the pelican became known to represent “*redemption through the blood of Christ, piety, sacrifice, or atonement.*”⁷

That Louisiana would choose to represent itself as a state with the image of a mother suffering such hard times as to feed her own flesh, Christ-like, to her offspring is indicative of Louisiana’s constant struggles against the natural ruggedness of the landscape and its violent weather changes. The often harsh conditions in Louisiana are paired with a great wealth of resources, however. This abundance has given birth to “massive installations of modern industry—oil refineries, bauxite and aluminum plants, complexes for converting cottonseed and bagasse, and countless other varieties of contemporary production.”⁸ The pelican functions in my prints as both a reference to Louisiana as well as to a sacrificial “mother earth,” symbolic of the natural wealth of this state, and how it has been exploited to the point of destruction by drilling, dumping, cutting and what amounts to overpopulation for so delicate a delta.

In the print *Trials and Tributaries* (Fig. 4), the mother pelican image is depicted as a colossus standing over the landscape. The smoky texture printed on subtle white and yellow fabrics is achieved through detailed line work battling intense wood grain, and it serves to promote a sense of foreboding. In the first of

⁷ Eva C. Hangen, *Symbols... Our Universal Language* (Wichita, Kansas: McCormick-Armstrong Co., 1962). 195. Joseph G., Jr. Tregle, "The Lower Mississippi," in *The Rivers and Bayous of Louisiana*, ed. Edwin Adams Davis, 144 (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana Education Research Association, 1968).

⁸ Joseph G., Jr. Tregle, "The Lower Mississippi," in *The Rivers and Bayous of Louisiana*, ed. Edwin Adams Davis, 144 (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana Education Research Association, 1968). 144.



Figure 4

Hannah March Sanders, Detail of *Trials and Tributaries*, woodcut print on fabrics & thread, 2011.

The Twelve Labors, Herakles is sent to slay a lion with impenetrable skin. After succeeding in this task through the use of strangulation, Herakles proceeds to don the lion's skin as a cloak throughout the remainder of the Labors.⁹ Near the bottom of the print *Trials and Tributaries*, the acquired lion's skin has been placed over the New Orleans Superdome to protect its inhabitants from future hurricanes (Fig 5).

⁹ Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths: Complete Edition* (London: Penguin Books, 1992). 465-467.

The smoke rising in the background represents the many fires that raged in the aftermath of hurricane Katrina in 2005 as well as the more recent oil explosion in the gulf. My disregard of a specific sense of time forces events into geological/ecological time, representing the longevity of the overlapping effects of events that occur many human years apart.



Figure 5

Hannah March Sanders, Detail of *Trials and Tributaries*, woodcut print on fabrics & thread, 2011.

The pelican is also the main figure in the woodcut *Pelican Hippolyta* (Fig. 6). The sharks in this image possess visages of British Petroleum executives, who are seen feeding ravenously off of Louisiana's coastal riches, depicted as black oil

seeping from the breast of a hybrid representation of the Amazonian Queen Hippolyta as part pelican from the ninth Labor of Herakles (Fig. 7).

Hippolyta represents virginal qualities both exploited and tapped. Her mastectomy scar identifies her as an Amazon woman; legend has it these great warriors would lop off one of their breasts to aid their shooting of bow and arrows.¹⁰ The loss of one breast in this image alludes to Louisiana's self-damaging actions in an attempt to make every last drop of her resources available to big business interests such as British Petroleum.¹¹ In Greek antiquity, the shearing of a breast exposed Amazon women such as Hippolyta as barbaric. In a more modern context relating to Christian symbolism of the Pelican image, my print *Pelican Hippolyta* might be read as an act of bodily self-sacrifice by a messianic "Mother Earth" figure.¹²

Along with the Louisiana black bear and the Pelican, the Mississippi river is another prevalent symbol of Louisiana. As Joseph G. Tregle, Jr. writes of the lower Mississippi, "From the earliest days of Louisiana as a French and Spanish colony [the Mississippi river] had been the spinal column from which depended the region's settlement and growth, as it is in large part even today."¹³ We have grown both richer through this great waterway, as well as have lived in fear of its strength and

¹⁰ Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths: Complete Edition* (London: Penguin Books, 1992). 355.

"'Amazons', usually derived from *a* and *mazon*, 'without breasts', because they were believed to sear away one breast in order to shoot better (but this notion is fantastic), seems to be an Armenian word, meaning 'moon-women'."

¹¹ Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths: Complete Edition* (London: Penguin Books, 1992). 486-494.

¹² Eva C. Hangen, *Symbols... Our Universal Language* (Wichita, Kansas: McCormick-Armstrong Co., 1962). 195.

¹³ Tregle, Jr. "The Lower Mississippi," in *The Rivers and Bayous of Louisiana*, ed. Edwin Adams Davis, 144 (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana Education Research Association, 1968). 143.



Figure 6

Hannah March Sanders, *Pelican HIPPOLYTA*, woodcut print on fabrics, thread & poly-fil, 2011.



Figure 7

Hannah March Sanders, Detail of *Pelican Hippolyta*, woodcut print on fabrics, thread & poly-fil, 2011.

THE MISSISSIPPI

potential for destruction. Currently, in the Spring of 2011, south Louisiana is experiencing record high water levels, which threaten the major port cities of Baton Rouge and New Orleans.

The river has long been powerful, but due to Federally mandated control of the Mississippi, the situation has been made much more dire. By the late 1940s, more than a third of the Mississippi's waters were actually naturally flowing into the

Atchafalaya basin, rather than along their former path.¹⁴ Through a massive system of levees and spillways, the government took control over the waters in order to divert exactly 70 percent of the Mississippi river's waters through Baton Rouge and New Orleans.¹⁵ This allowed these cities to maintain their port status, against the Mississippi's current tendencies to flow elsewhere. The most recent action by the Army Core of Engineers opened emergency floodgates of the Morganza spillway on May 14, 2011. While hopefully saving major cities such as Baton Rouge and New Orleans from record flood levels, the opening of the spillway "is expected to cover about 3,000 square miles in central and South Louisiana's Atchafalaya River Basin under as much as 25 feet of water."¹⁶

My print *Hermaphroditic Herakles Black Bear Battles the Gator-headed Sucker-legged Hydra, Henceforth Known as "Mississippi."* *Blue Crab Assist* represents our continuous battle to control the Mississippi river while harvesting its many riches (Fig. 8). I have related the Lower Mississippi to the Lernaean Hydra of the Second Labor of Herakles. In this task, Herakles battles a giant water creature with seven to nine heads, assisted by a crab, as can be seen in a Classical Depiction *Vase No. 461* by Diosphos P (Fig. 1). Also seen in *Vase No. 461* is a fire created by Herakles to dry out the ground, controlling massive underground waterways in order to harness the great hydra. One may not readily see a river as an opponent, but U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has been promoting this idea for many years now. In a film depicting "the navigation lock and a complex of associated structures built in an

¹⁴ John McPhee, "Atchafalaya: The Control of Nature," *The New Yorker*, February 1987: 1.

¹⁵ John McPhee, "Atchafalaya: The Control of Nature," *The New Yorker*, February 1987: 3.

¹⁶ Farm Press Editorial Staff, "Corps of Enineers Opens Morganza Floodgates," *Delta Farm Press*, May 14, 2011, (accessed May 15, 2011). 1.

effort to prevent the capture of the Mississippi," the narrator said, "This nation has a large and powerful adversary. Our opponent could cause the United States to lose nearly all her seaborne commerce, to lose her standing as first among trading nations. . . .We are fighting Mother Nature. . . .It's a battle we have to fight day by day, year by year; the health of our economy depends on victory."¹⁷

GREAT DIVIDES

In addition to addressing ecological and corporate concerns in Southern Louisiana, I also confronted issues of education funding in my exploration of The Labors. In *Letters to Bobby J.: Eschewing Education*, Herakles Black Bear takes the place of Atlas, just as Herakles did in the eleventh Greek Labor, The Apples of Hesperides (Fig. 9).¹⁸ Here, Herakles Bear is depicted as a hybrid not only of man and animal but also of woman. I have intentionally confused the gender of Herakles bear: depicted throughout the series from various angles, he/she is slowly revealed to possess the genitalia of both genders; or, perhaps, to seem to evolve from one to the other until his/her full frontal depiction in my print.

The use of nudity expressed through the representation of the hybrid characters' genitalia has a variety of meanings. As Larissa Bonfonte writes, "In the Old Testament nakedness always signifies poverty, shame, slavery, humiliation. In the ancient Near East and elsewhere it is a sign of defeat—naked, bound prisoners were paraded in the king's victory celebration, and are thus represented on

¹⁷ John McPhee, "Atchafalaya: The Control of Nature," *The New Yorker*, February 1987: 2.

¹⁸ Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths: Complete Edition* (London: Penguin Books, 1992). 507-514.

innumerable monuments. The slain enemy, regularly stripped of clothes or armor, lies naked. As in a dream of anxiety, nakedness exposes you to fear and shame.”¹⁹ She goes on to say, however, that in Greek art, nudity had a very different symbolism as representative of the “beauty and pride of the male human body, without cover or adornment.”²⁰

The concept of nudity has been, after all, inexorably paired with access to knowledge, as is exemplified in the book of Genesis from the Bible. In *Letters to Bobby J.*, education funding is the expression of the quest for knowledge symbolized by the apples in the Labor The Apples of Hesperides. In this print, the main figure of Herakles Black Bear struggles to support the weight of the world,” represented by the Louisiana State Capitol building for Governor Jindal (“Atlas”) while he is away fundraising.

The paper airplanes in the print, which are inscribed with Jindal’s name as well as that of Louisiana State University’s outgoing student body president, J. Ryan Hudson, are meant to represent Hudson’s letters requesting meetings with the Governor regarding the effects of his budget cuts to public universities in the state of Louisiana. Hudson, who had a difficult time getting a meeting with Governor Jindal, wrote a letter to him, which was published in the newspapers of states where Jindal was away campaigning. Instead, according to Hudson, the Governor should have remained here in Louisiana where there was much work to be done as a result of budget cuts.

¹⁹ Larissa Bonfante, "Nudity as Costume in Classical Art," *American Journal of Archaeology*, October 1989: 546.

²⁰ Larissa Bonfante, "Nudity as Costume in Classical Art," *American Journal of Archaeology*, October 1989: 546.



Figure 8

Hannah March Sanders, *Hermaphroditic Herakles Black Bear Battles the Gator-headed Sucker-legged Hydra, Henceforth Known as "Mississippi."* Blue Crab Assist., woodcut monoprint on fabric & thread, 9' x 4', 2011.



Figure 9

Hannah March Sanders, *Letters to Bobby J.*, woodcut print on fabrics, thread, poly-fil and letterpress printing on college-ruled notebook paper, 10' x 4' x 3', 2011.

In its installed form, the woodcut print on fabric is accompanied by over four hundred letterpress-printed versions of Hudson's letter, folded into the form of paper airplanes, which viewers of the work will be free to take with them as they leave the gallery. Additionally, Hudson was present at the show's reception to discuss the problem of education funding in these hard economic environment. As this body of work will first be displayed on Louisiana State University's campus, it is my hope that this work will foster awareness among the proper audience: the very students affected by these budget cuts, who may then carry the cause further to ensure that it continues to be addressed in both student and state government.

ANIMAL AS OPEN CULTURAL SYMBOL

Beyond the relationship posited between these Greek myths and contemporary Louisiana narratives, my thesis explores our relationship to animals in a shared ecosystem. Animal imagery is one of the oldest sources of inspiration in artwork, dating back even farther than the caves of Lascaux.²¹ However, our relationship with animals has changed greatly over time. In his essay, "Why Look at Animals?," John Berger charts how our place changed from being among the beasts, looking at them and being looked at by them, to caging them physically and in inside metaphor--their substance made soft and cuddly in the form of stuffed and cartoon animals and their natural populations dwindling as a result of our exploitation and their imprisonment in concrete zoos.²² Despite the vast change in our relationship with the natural world and wild beasts, we still harbor deep ties

²¹ Steve Baker, *The Postmodern Animal* (London: Reaktion Books, LTD, 2000). John. Berger, "Why Look at Animals?," in *About Looking* (New York, New York: Pantheon Books, 1980).

²² John. Berger, "Why Look at Animals?," in *About Looking* (New York, New York: Pantheon Books, 1980).

with our fellow animals. These relationships are fostered through an enduring biological necessity as sources of food, clothing and, still, occasionally transportation, but they are also emotionally, physically and spiritually a part of our identity as human beings.

Animals could be adapted to depict almost any emotional, cultural or political meaning with enough persuasion of expression and context. Baker asks, “...why is it that our ideas of the animal—perhaps more than any other set of ideas—are the ones which enable us to frame and express ideas about *human* identity?”²³ I embrace the open-ended nature of the animal symbol in my thesis—hoping to invoke both Greek mythological references and common animal symbolism first promoted in the ancient *Physiologis* and still marketed today through political cartoons and Walt Disney characters. By hybridizing the beasts with some of the very qualities that humanity has deemed base and imperfect, such as beer potbellies and scraggly body hair, I endeavor to draw attention to our encroachment on the Louisiana landscape, and the havoc our actions are wreaking on local fauna.

As Steve Baker asks in *Picturing the Beast*, “What happens when the question of what animals signify is asked in relation to our own experience?” According to Baker, animals are not considered as individuals in and of themselves. In the Western World, animals are seen more as types, whose characteristics serve “...to make a statement about human identity.”²⁴ Adopting Baker’s call for an

²³ Steve Baker, *Picturing the Beast: Animals, Identity and Representation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003). 6.

²⁴ Steve Baker, *Picturing the Beast: Animals, Identity and Representation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003). 6.

interdisciplinary study of animal symbolism, the animal hybrid characters in my series of woodcuts serve to exemplify the consequences of our dominion over the natural kingdom.

In addition to Steve Baker's writings and *The Twelve Labors*, I also draw inspiration from the writings of a variety of other authors. The most influential among these are David Quammen, a science and nature writer who focuses on the relationship between nature and human culture. As Quammen writes in his book *Monster of God: The Man-Eating Predator in the Jungles of History and the Mind*:

Great and terrible flesh-eating beasts have always shared the landscape with humans. They were part of the ecological matrix within which *Homo sapiens* evolved. They were part of the psychological context in which our sense of identity as a species arose. They were part of the spiritual systems that we invented for coping. The teeth of big predators, their claws, their ferocity and their hunger, were grim realities that could be eluded but not forgotten. Every once in a while, a monstrous carnivore emerged like doom from a forest or a river to kill someone and feed on the body. It was a familiar sort of disaster—like auto fatalities today—that must have seemed freshly, shockingly gruesome each time, despite the familiarity. And it conveyed a certain message. Among the earliest forms of human self-awareness was the awareness of being meat.²⁵

This recognition of the power and beauty of animals is brought forth in the work of British artists Olly and Suzi (Fig. 10, 11). This daring team of British artists makes their artwork out in the wild through interactions with fauna, often mere feet away from dangerous beasts such as lions, great white sharks, and alligators. Their works are generally a combination of performance and its documentation through drawings, paintings, photographs, videos and the resulting installations.

²⁵ David Quammen, *Monster of God: The Man-Eating Predator in the Jungles of History and the Mind* (New York, New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2003). 3.

As Steve Baker writes in *The Postmodern Animal*, “For Olly and Suzi...the animal is a reminder of the limits of human understanding and influence, but also of the value of working at those limits. The very existence of dangerous wild animals ‘keeps us in check’, they state, and serves to warn that humans (including artists) are ‘not the boss of everything.’”²⁶ Olly and Suzi work with the subject matter of endangered predators to bring back the “awareness of being meat,” that Quammen writes about. Through close encounters and interactions with dangerous animals, Olly and Suzi “attempt to express directly their sense of the beauty and perfection of these animals.”²⁷



Figure 10

Olly & Suzi, *Shark Installation*:
White Shark 1, Isla de Guadalupe, Caran Dache Aquarelle and non-toxic acrylic on paper 15 x 38", 2003. Collection of the Artist.

²⁶ Steve Baker, *The Postmodern Animal* (London: Reaktion Books, LTD, 2000). 16.

²⁷ Steve Baker, *The Postmodern Animal* (London: Reaktion Books, LTD, 2000). 11.

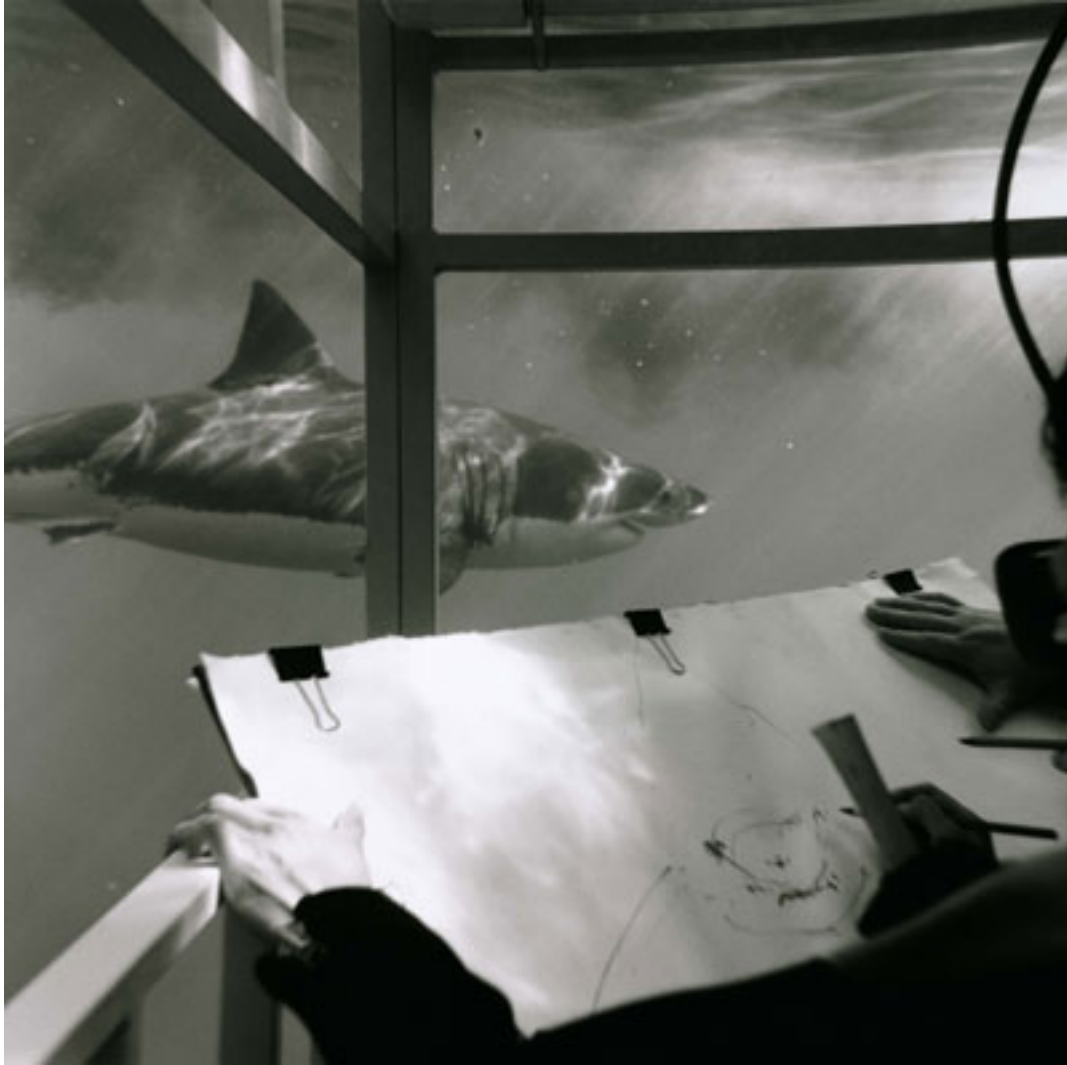


Figure 11

Olly & Suzi with Greg Williams, photograph of making art with sharks in Open Water for *Shark Installation*, Guadalupe, Mexico, Collection of the Artist, 2003.

Sue Coe is a contemporary printmaker, drawer and painter from whom I draw visual as well as conceptual inspiration (Fig. 12, 13). The intent of her artwork is to promote her moral and political beliefs about the role of animals in contemporary society. Coe draws directly from life, visiting meatpacking plants, and she includes notes with her drawings. I am inspired by these sketchbook renditions

most of all for their pithy line work and telling descriptions.²⁸ As Tom Regan writes in the preface of Sue Coe's book *Dead Meat*, Coe's work explores "what [food animals] are due from us, how we morally ought to treat them," and how the answer to these questions will begin "with the recognition of our psychological kinship with them."²⁹

Similarly intending to raise awareness about animal rights and survival, although quite divergent from Coe in terms of visual qualities, is the work of watercolorist and sometimes printmaker Walton Ford (Fig. 14). Ford's works draw inspiration from John James Audubon's *Birds of America*, as well as his personal research on fantastic extinct animal species. Ford's subject matter might be summed up by "the frequently-disastrous consequences of man's encounters with animals."³⁰ Similar to the inherent drama within Audubon's watercolors, there is an "expectation of narrative" in Ford's artwork.³¹ In my own woodcuts, I hope to employ this dramatic potential by staging precarious situations and the possibility for violent encounters among the figures in my prints.

DRAMA & VIOLENCE

The suggestion of drama is accomplished in my prints in part by employing Greek framing devices, notably in *The Capture of Cerberus in the 9th Ward* (Fig. 15).

²⁸ Steve Baker, *The Postmodern Animal* (London: Reaktion Books, LTD, 2000). 178.

²⁹ Tom Regan, "Preface: The Burden of Complicity," in *Dead Meat*, 2 (New York, New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 1995). 2.

³⁰ Steven Katz, "Walton Ford: A Personal History of His Work," in *Walton Ford: Tigers of Wrath, Horses of Instruction* (New York, New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1994). 8-9.

³¹ Steven Katz, "Walton Ford: A Personal History of His Work," in *Walton Ford: Tigers of Wrath, Horses of Instruction* (New York, New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1994). 11.



Figure 12

Sue Coe, *Reagan as a Pig*, graphite on paper, 20 x 30", 1983.

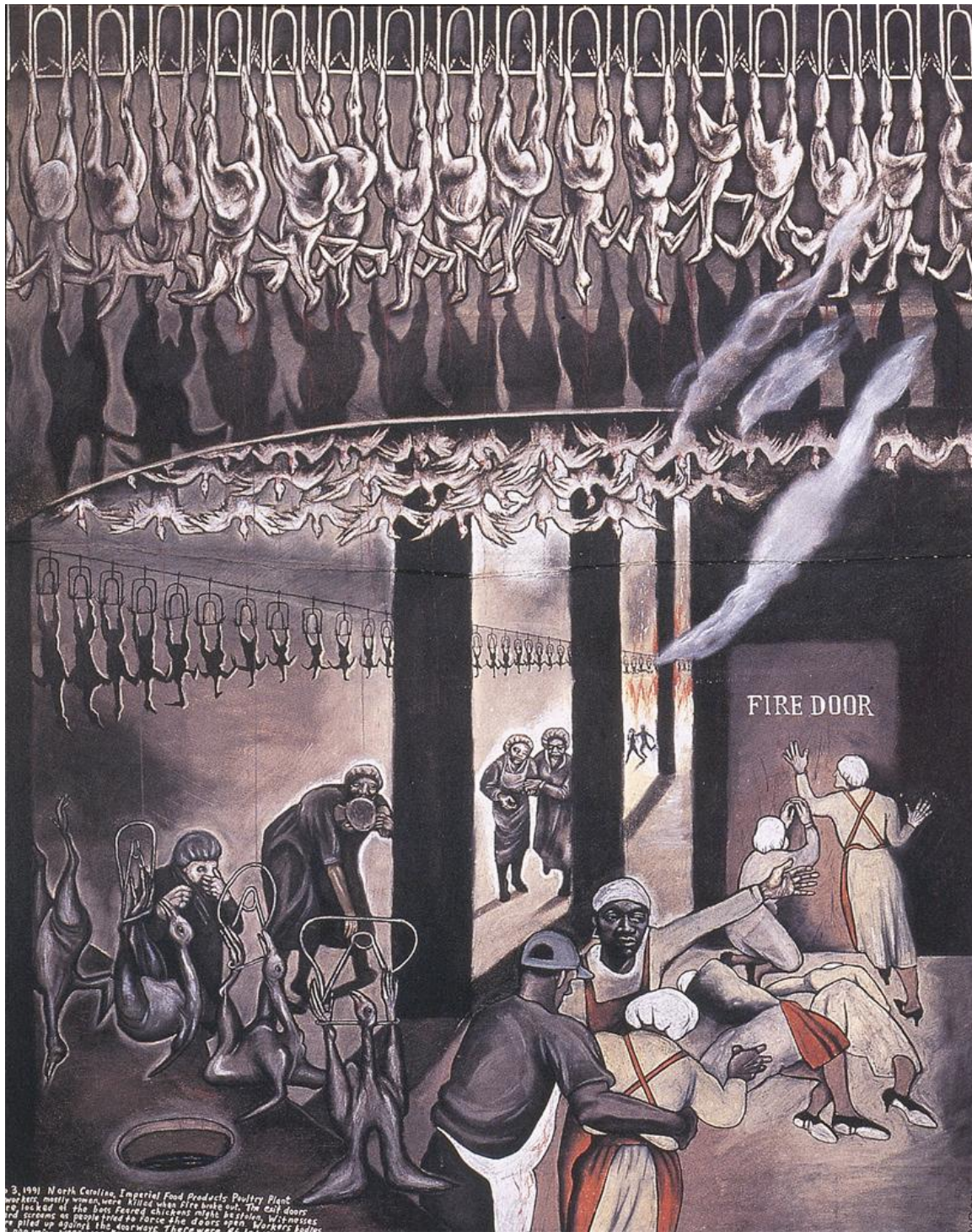


Figure 13

Sue Coe, *The Poultry Plant Fire*, pastel, gouache and pencil on paper, 123.8 x 101.6 cm, 1951.



Figure 14

Walton Ford, *Tale of Johnny Nutkin*,
 six color hardground and softground etching, aquatint, spit-bite aquatint, drypoint
 on Somerset Satin paper, 44 x 31 inches (111.8 x 78.7 cm), Edition of 50, 2001.

Similar to the Erskine Cup, *Cerberus*, by the Hunt Painter (Fig. 16), I have focused the image in on Cerberus himself, cropping Herakles Black Bear so that only his clawed hands and the telltale form of his roughly-hewn club are visible. According to Jeffery Hurwit's writings on the role of frame in Greek art, this tight cropping forms a "'window' upon an imagined (but very incomplete) world" that denies "complete visibility" opening the scene to the investigation of the spectator. This feature serves to involve viewers in the image as well as create a sense of drama, of continued motion and of selective focus. According to Hurwit, such cropping may also imply violence.³²

In my woodcuts, implied violence serves to entice the viewer to spend more time with the print, survey the details and read between the wood grain for hidden meaning. I accentuate the level of grotesque detail in order to move away from overly simplified statehood animal symbolism. I also introduce a level of ambiguity between naturalistic detail of hair and feathers and the decidedly off-putting, awkward hybridity of human and beast. This ambiguity is furthered by my use of sweet, patterned fabrics, which contrast visually with the detailed line-work as well as with the grotesque nature of the depicted figures.

Drawing relationships to the hybrids' abject interiors, I depict the characters' exposed genitalia, open mouths, drops of blood and other bodily fluids. These details serve in a simultaneous attempt to draw viewers in as well as to invoke a sense of pity on behalf of the characters. Exposed and damaged, their bodily forms have been

³² Jeffrey Hurwit, "Image and Frame in Greek Art," *American Journal of Archaeology*, Winter 1997. 6-9.



Figure 15

Hannah March Sanders, *The Capture of Cerberus in the 9th Ward*, woodcut on fabrics, thread, 8' x 4', 2011.



Figure 16

Hunt Painter, *Cerberus*, Lakonian ceramic cup, Erskine Collection, c. 560 B.C.

made awkward through their hybridization with human characteristics and situations.

FOOT PRINTS

Alongside the large woodcut prints, I have created a series of crocheted floor pieces. Encompassing scraps of fabric from my printing process as well as repurposed clothing donations, these floor pieces allow me to conserve and reuse materials (Fig. 17). I have named this series of floor pieces “foot prints.” The name

“foot print” speaks both to their apparent function as rugs as well as a play on the idea of reducing humanity’s footprint on the environment by reusing materials as much as possible in my process. In addition to promoting ecologically minded conservation of materials, the “foot prints” also make a metaphoric reference to my “weaving” of various narrative strands together in this body of work. The “foot prints” that sold at my exhibition funded donations to the National Wildlife Federation to support Gulf oil spill clean-up efforts.

The “foot prints” have connotations of home, protection and safety, as well as an obsessive quality. The knotting and stacking of strands to form a larger shape mirror the build-up of line work in the woodcuts. They are measured—not mathematically, but in units of hand-turned knots. The details are relative to changes in shape and form rather than following an exact pattern, much in the way that the detailed hatching and crosshatching function in the prints. The form of the “foot prints” mirrors an elusive smoke-cloud, ephemeral and foreboding.

The “foot prints,” imbued with a distinct quality of time in their billows, evoke changing weather conditions—the whims of the wind—like a trail to disaster, a beacon of chemically-combusting loss. Their forms and colors mirror those of Doppler radar images of monstrous weather conditions, encroaching on painfully smaller coastal cities and ecosystems.

The crochet work and the woodcarvings both straddle the divide between two-dimensional and three-dimensional. The weaving is a flattened three-dimensional construction, while woodcarving is a three-dimensional endeavor



Figure 17

Hannah March Sanders, Installation view with *Foot Prints No. 3-6 & No. 10-11*, approx 10' x 13', crocheted prints on fabric and clothing donations, 2011.

converted to a two-dimensional image through the printing process. The two-dimensional prints are then enlivened with three-dimensional embellishments through appliqué stitching and through natural folds in the fabric (Fig. 18, 19). The qualities of sculpting remain in both mediums. Each functions by layering, and the qualities of fabric employed in the woodcuts through selective appliqué and in the “foot prints” through decorative knotting to produce patterns that mirror the line work of the prints and create a sense of depth and movement.



Figure 18

Hannah March Sanders, Detail of woodblock for *White Flight: Herakles Bear & the Stymphalian Birds*, Birch plywood, charcoal, gesso, pencil, polyurethane and ink stain, 2011.

CONCLUSION

All of the prints contain pluming shapes of water, smoke, oil or a combination of these. Each is a symbol of their inherent nature as unharnessed, potent and potentially destructive forces. This powerful image of pluming dangerous substances or weather systems is the embodiment of the force behind *Trials and Tributaries*. Seen on television behind newscasters and in our own backyards, the image of the plume is a symbol of the benefits as well as the dangers of existing in



Figure 19

Hannah March Sanders, Detail of *White Flight: Herakles Bear & the Stymphalian Birds*, Woodcut on fabric, thread, 2011.

this treacherous, yet rich delta region. I sincerely hope our culture may learn to take less and begin repairing the damage of harnessing the Mississippi river to our transient human needs, giving its wealth of nutrients back to the land and its natural inhabitants. Otherwise, nature may soon retake its claim on its own violent terms, in a series of disastrous meteorological feats.

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VITA

Hannah Sanders was born Hannah March Campbell in Athens, Georgia, to an offset lithographer/painter and a ceramicist/high school English teacher. She spent the majority of her formative years a couple of hours south in Macon, Georgia, on the floor near her mother's pottery wheel. Hannah graduated from the International Baccalaureate Program at Central High School in 2003. She then moved to Louisiana, where she studied studio art, philosophy and art history at Tulane University in New Orleans from 2003-2007. After a year back in the city of her birth working in production screen-printing, Hannah was accepted to Louisiana State University's master of fine arts program in printmaking. Hannah and her husband were recently married in an art exhibition with accompanying panel discussion, which they organized in conjunction with the 2011 Southern Graphics Council Conference in Saint Louis, Missouri, emphasizing printmaking partnerships and the balance of collaboration and critique in artistic studio practice.